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Four Cities Receive \$12 Million to Improve College Graduation Rates

San Francisco, New York, Mesa (AZ), and Riverside (CA) set ambitious goals to get more low-income youth successfully through college

SEATTLE – The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the National League of Cities today announced \$12 million in grants to fund innovative proposals to boost college completion rates in four cities. The grants are part of the Communities Learning in Partnership initiative, which is led by the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families.

New York City, San Francisco, Mesa, Ariz., and Riverside, Calif., will each receive \$3 million over the next three years to align academic standards between high school and college, strengthen data systems, implement early assessment and college prep strategies, and create support systems to help dramatically increase the number of students who earn a postsecondary degree or credential.

"The mayors in these cities are truly national leaders in recognizing the long-term impact of an educated workforce on their local economies," said Donald J. Borut, executive director of the National League of Cities. "They are committed to bold goals for improving college completion rates and have created strong partnerships to address the challenges students face in earning a degree."

With support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the National League of Cities, each city has already brought together mayors and other municipal leaders, K-12 superintendents, and community colleges over the past nine months to devise new ways of helping more students successfully complete an education beyond high school. The grants announced today will allow those plans to be implemented.

Community colleges are critical to economic development because they offer affordable training and degrees to local residents. Indeed, across the country, enrollment is at an all-time high as students and displaced workers seek an edge in a tight job market. Yet history shows that less than one-quarter of students earn a degree within three years. Often it's not a question of effort. Rather, today's students face multiple challenges: many are not academically ready for college-level work; they juggle school and family responsibilities; and many must work full-time while attending classes.

For the cities receiving grants today, the numbers are stark:

- Low-income students who have graduated from Mesa Public Schools and go on to attend Mesa Community College have a 5.4 percent graduation rate.
- At the City University of New York, 10 percent of the students enrolled as freshman in 2006 had earned an associate's degree three years later.
- The graduation rate at Riverside City College is 14 percent.
- In San Francisco, 27 percent of 9th graders will earn a postsecondary credential.

“We know that in today’s economic climate and labor market, a high school diploma is no longer enough,” said Allan Golston, president of the U.S. Program at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “We must not only ensure that young people have access to college; we must ensure that they go on to complete college and earn a degree or certificate with value in the workplace.”

According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, the U.S. labor market will be short 3 million college-educated workers over the next eight years unless there is a dramatic increase in the number of young adults who successfully complete college. The mayors of the four cities receiving grants today recognize that increasing completion rates requires the coordinated efforts of government agencies, higher education institutions, community groups, and the private sector.

Over the next three years, these grants will support efforts to coordinate and streamline the guidance and services young people need to get into, and through, college.

- **Research Foundation of the City University of New York:** Align academic standards between the City University of New York and the city’s K-12 public schools and coordination of academic advising and counseling in an effort to double associate degree completion rates by 2020. *NYC College Readiness & Success Initiative contact: Jessica Scaperotti, City of New York (JScaperotti@cityhall.nyc.gov).*
- **City and County of San Francisco:** Align curriculum and teaching across systems and create support systems to help students navigate to and through college, while ensuring multiple pathways to graduation, in an effort to increase the college completion rates of high school freshmen from 30 percent to 50 percent by 2020. *San Francisco Partnership for Postsecondary Success contact: San Francisco Mayor's Office of Communications (mayorspressoffice@sfgov.org).*
- **City of Mesa in Arizona:** Coordinate student success policies and practices across educational systems by implementing a shared accountability framework in an effort to increase the completion rates of low-income youth from 8 percent to 16 percent by 2020. *Mesa Counts on College contact: Steve Wright, City of Mesa (steven.wright@mesaaz.gov), Sonia Filan, Maricopa Community College (Sonia.filan@mcmail.maricopa.edu), Kathy Bareiss, Mesa Public Schools (kbareiss@mpsaz.org)*
- **Riverside City College in California:** Implement early assessment and accelerated college prep strategies, employer-supported degree paths, and a coordinated network of academic, student, and social support services in an effort to boost associate degree completion rates at Riverside City College from 14 percent to 20 percent by 2013. *Riverside Learning Partnership contact: Shelagh Camak, Riverside City College (shelagh.camak@rcc.edu), Lizette Navarette, City of Riverside (Lnavarette@riversideca.gov).*

The Gates Foundation’s United States Program works to ensure that all students graduate high school prepared to succeed in college and careers, and dramatically increase the number of

young people who complete a degree beyond high school with real value in the workplace. Since 2000, the foundation has invested \$5 billion in grants and scholarships to improve opportunity in the United States by improving schools, raising college-ready graduation rates, and increasing college completion rates.

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Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and Co-Chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

The National League of Cities

The National League of Cities is the nation's oldest and largest organization devoted to strengthening and promoting cities as centers of opportunity, leadership and governance. NLC is a resource and advocate for 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 218 million Americans. For more information, visit www.nlc.org.